# Highlights from a #YALICHAT with Ambassador Cathy Russell

U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Cathy Russell held a Twitter chat with the YALI Network on Wednesday, March 2nd to talk about challenges facing women in Africa and to support the #Africa4Her campaign.



Excited to join some of Africa's most promising leaders in a few minutes for a <u>#YALICHAT</u> on <u>#Africa4Her</u>.

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 2, 2016

#### Ambassador Russell started with a question for the YALI Network...

Before I get to your questions, I have a question for you: What challenges do women and girls face in your community? #Africa4Her #YALICHAT

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 2, 2016

#### And received some critical answers...

<u>@ambcathyrussell</u> <u>@yalinetwork</u> The general notion that women are inferior to men <u>#Africa4Her</u> #YALICHAT

— Anthony Ekene (@AnthonyEkene) March 2, 2016



<u>@AmbCathyRussell</u> <u>@YALINetwork</u> In my country women face physical abuse which in most scenarios end up in murder cases.<u>#YALICHAT</u> <u>#Africa4Her</u> — Deon Shekuza (@dshekuza) <u>March</u> 2, 2016

<u>@AmbCathyRussell</u> <u>@YALINetwork</u> No access to entrepreneurial skills and self development <u>#YALICHAT</u> — Victoria Okosun (@vickyslyrics) <u>March 2, 2016</u>

#### Then it was on to answer questions from the YALI Network!

@IMaluza	Gender-based	violence	needs	to be	treated	as a	ı crime,	not a	family	matter.
#Africa4Her #YALICHAT — Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 2, 2016										

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<u>@IsabellaMuthoni</u> A key piece is promoting education for girls. Women's empowerment starts with girls' education. <u>#Africa4Her</u> — Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) <u>March 2, 2016</u>

<u>@dgeniusjude</u> We see four keys areas: women's economic and political participation, addressing GBV, supporting girls education. <u>#Africa4Her</u>

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 2, 2016



<u>@admasb</u> <u>@YALINetwork</u> My mother has a huge inspiration for me because she taught me and my sisters that we could do anything. <u>#Africa4Her</u>

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 2, 2016

<u>@DassilvaManga</u> Success is having the opportunity and ability to do what you want in life. There is no one path to success. <u>#Africa4Her</u>

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 2, 2016



<u>@Sandytey</u> I'd encourage you to look into local village savings and loan initiatives and efforts to see if there are local options.

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 2, 2016

With hundreds of questions submitted, your curiosity and engagement continues to drive the #Africa4Her campaign to new heights!

I just heard that we've received over 12,000 pledges for #Africa4Her — that's amazing! #YALICHAT

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 2, 2016

#### Ambassador Russell signed off with a renewed pledge to the YALI Network...

I'm thrilled to take the <u>#Africa4Her</u> pledge again this year. I hope you'll join me: <u>https://t.co/XHByfgwTqW pic.twitter.com/eor82y8Rrc</u>

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) March 3, 2016

#### The YALI Network looks forward to more #YALICHATS with Ambassador Russell!

<u>@AmbCathyRussell</u> Thank you for the time you spared to share with us, We a humbled. #Africa4Her #YALICHAT @usmissionuganda @YALINetwork

— ABEJA JULIET (@123 abeja) March 3, 2016

<u>@AmbCathyRussell</u> we will join you, lets work for our beloved ones together. <u>#Africa4Her</u>

— yakob g/egzabher (@yakob g) March 3, 2016

### <u>Election Time: Lessons from Young</u> Leaders

Voters in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, line up to cast their ballots on November 29, ≥ 2015. (© AP Images)

Lex Paulson is an attorney, professor, writer, and consultant in international governance. He's worked as a facilitator and trainer for NGOs in Uganda, Burundi, Niger, Ghana, Congo-Brazzaville, Benin, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire, on issues related to democratic engagement and accountable government.

The election was going to be too close to call. The mood at campaign headquarters — "headquarters" being too grand a word; it was just a simple apartment — was anxious. Our candidate, energetic and eloquent, may have been more anxious than any of us. We knew he hadn't slept for three nights before Election Day. We had worked so hard and earned the support of so many voters — but what if they stayed home, or changed their minds? What would we do if our opponent, that career politician with the "trust me" grin, won the election? Would all our work go to waste?

This was the story of my first campaign, but it could be your story too. Elections are a time when a community makes big decisions, and these decisions can bring out the best and the worst in us. I've helped train young activists in Benin and Egypt, worked with political journalists in Uganda and small-business owners in Côte d'Ivoire, and led a national evaluation of election monitors in Guinea. As different as these countries are from one another, at election time I recognize the exact same emotions — nervousness, hopefulness, excitement, doubt — that I felt as a 19-year-old on that city-council campaign in New Haven, Connecticut.

As a professor now at the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris (called "Sciences Po" for short), my students and I have the privilege of teaming up with the Young African Leaders Initiative Network in 2016 to explore the challenges that face us during election season. How can young people help ensure that elections are fair and peaceful? How can they bring their own ideas — even surprising and new ones — into the political debate? How can we mobilize our communities to get educated about politics and show up on Election Day? How do we ready ourselves for the work after Election Day, win or lose?

Elections can be full of anxiety and frustration, but so too can they bring out our better angels. Campaigns get us out into the community to meet new people, learn about their lives, and debate together how we can make change. We form teams, work hard and find new skills we didn't know we had before. And in the process, new leaders can come out of the most unexpected places. You may be one of them.

In the months ahead, we at Sciences Po will be sharing stories and lessons from all over the world as we engage with you on these powerful questions. We look forward to discussing and debating them with the entire YALI community. Together I think we can bring the promise of democracy — with all its frustrations and faults — another step closer to reality.

In our next post, we'll be sharing lessons on how youth in Senegal peacefully organized to strengthen democracy around the 2012 national elections.

## Want to Energize Young Voters? Look Beyond Elections

In the run-up to Senegal's 2012 elections, Sobel Aziz Ngom and his friends mounted a voter education campaign that combined social media, print, television and one-on-one outreach. For all the positive effect the campaign had, Ngom came away thinking he had defined the problem he was trying to solve too narrowly.

"The main challenge," Ngom said, "is not how to mobilize youth to vote, but how to make them citizens first." While most of the people he is working to reach were born into citizenship, Ngom sees true citizenship as something different: "Citizenship is something you build and cultivate." Ngom says what matters even more than whether or not youth vote is why they vote. "Most of them are voting because people give them T-shirts or money or promise them things. They don't really understand all the implications of a vote." The main challenge today, he believes, is to activate this sense of citizenship. Being a citizen, he said, "is not just voting every five years — it's more than that. If you want to understand the issues of your country, you have to be more engaged in your local community and public affairs."

Ngom thinks social media offers an important opportunity for candidates and leaders to communicate with youth. He just wishes they used it better. "They don't understand the 'social' in 'social media,'" he said. "They're just announcing information, and you never know if they even read the comments." Recently, he met with a government minister to encourage him to take advantage of social media. "Many people are doing good work that aligns with your policies," he reported telling the official. "You have to know who they are and how to interact with them."

In Senegal, Ngom believes, young people's ability to understand the importance of their vote and the duties of citizenship is undercut by too little knowledge of their own nation's history. "In school, what we learn in class is the Cold War and the World War II," he said. "We learn three or four African heroes from 200 years ago, but we don't know where we are coming from in the last century. It's hard to build your citizenship or have a feeling of belonging if you don't know what you belong to."

Take the YALI Network Online Course "<u>Understanding Elections and Civic Responsibility</u>" to learn, among other things, what your vote means and the responsibilities that come with it.

## **Snowflakes in Niger**

Adrienne Lever discussing civic engagement in Niamey in November 2015. (Courtesy photo)

Adrienne Lever didn't bring much experience to Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. "I graduated [from] Berkeley, got in my car and drove to a campaign office," Lever says of her 23-year-

old self. "I just worked as a volunteer until they hired me." She ended up as a regional director for field programs in seven states, and has focused her work on activism and community organizing ever since.

Lever took what she learned from her on-the-ground work for the president's campaign and now helps community leaders who want to effect change.

Recently, Lever traveled to Niger to talk to groups of women and young people in Niamey, Dosso and Tillabéry. In these gatherings, she discussed civic engagement before, during and after elections. She also gave a lecture at the University of Niamey about what she'd learned from the 2008 Obama campaign.

"The strength in grass-roots mobilization comes from a spirit of volunteerism," said Lever, "from engaging people around the issues that they care about and talking to young people about things that are going to touch their lives."

Adrienne Lever (Courtesy photo)

She said that in many countries in Africa she's visited, "there's a broad frustration that young people don't have a voice because no one will elect them." The lesson of American campaigns she's worked on is that "nobody gets involved in a campaign or activity around politics because they think they're going to end up being a member of Congress. They do it because they believe in a cause, because there's something they want to change in the world or their community. That's the spirit of participation that campaigns in the U.S. use to engage young people, by showing them that there is an impact for them, that it's not just about what's happening in the White House."

Among the tools she urged her Nigerien audiences to employ to maximize their networks' effectiveness was the snowflake model of organizing. First articulated by longtime organizer and Harvard professor Marshall Ganz, the snowflake model replaces a single leader in a network with interconnected leaders, each responsible for an aspect of a campaign. In this model, Ganz says, leadership is a practice and not a position.

In the example below, the dark blue figures represent regional organizers who each interact with two green figures (representing community coordinators), who each interact with five community members (light blue).

An illustration of the snowflake model of community organizing, in which a single leader is replaced with interconnected leaders. (State Dept./Doug Thompson)

"People — and not just around election cycles — have been able to find power in building numbers by talking to people one person at a time," said Lever. "By working on changing one heart and mind you build an exponential power base, and that's how you change your environment and your world, ultimately."

